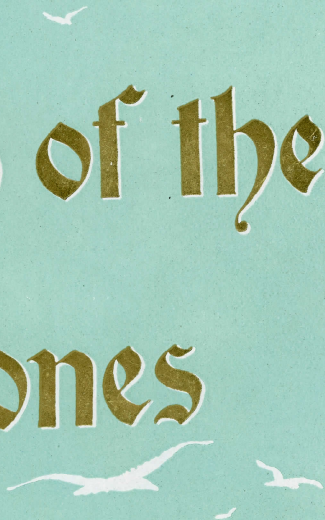




The Story of the
farallones



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... THE ...
STORY OF THE FARALLONES

TEXT BY

C. BARLOW

ARRANGED AND PUBLISHED BY

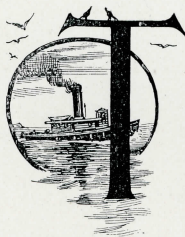
H. R. TAYLOR

EDITOR OF "THE NIDOLOGIST"

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THE TUG "ACTIVE" was plunging through a heavy sea far out beyond the bar, and we were expectantly watching for a first glimpse of the Farallones, when seemingly, from out the crest of a wave, in the distance, two gray peaks of rock rising abruptly from the ocean for a moment, came into view. Slow progress against a heavy head-wind finally brought us to within a few hundred yards of the shore, where we were landed on the rough rocks of East End, partially hidden by a fringe of breakers.

Who can picture one's first impressions of such a place as the Farallones? Unsteadied by the severe voyage, we sought a tortuous path over the rocks and around the hills, which led to the keeper's house. A high wind had stirred up the white-caps on old Ocean and the spray was dashing in grandeur along the rough shore line. Far upon the Lighthouse Hill came a din from the unnumbered feathered population of Murres, Puffins and Cormorants—a ceaseless monotone as it were—with the harsh *g-r-a-h-h-h* of the Murres mingling with the other incessant bird cries. Overhead the Western Gulls sailed noiselessly, excepting for a harsh cry and angry swoop as we neared some nest among the rocks. At every step some new wonder was unfolded and the bewilderment of it all can never be forgotten.

On my second visit the island was approached in a dense fog and a landing effected in the usual place in Fisherman's Bay. This time Sugar Loaf Rock first



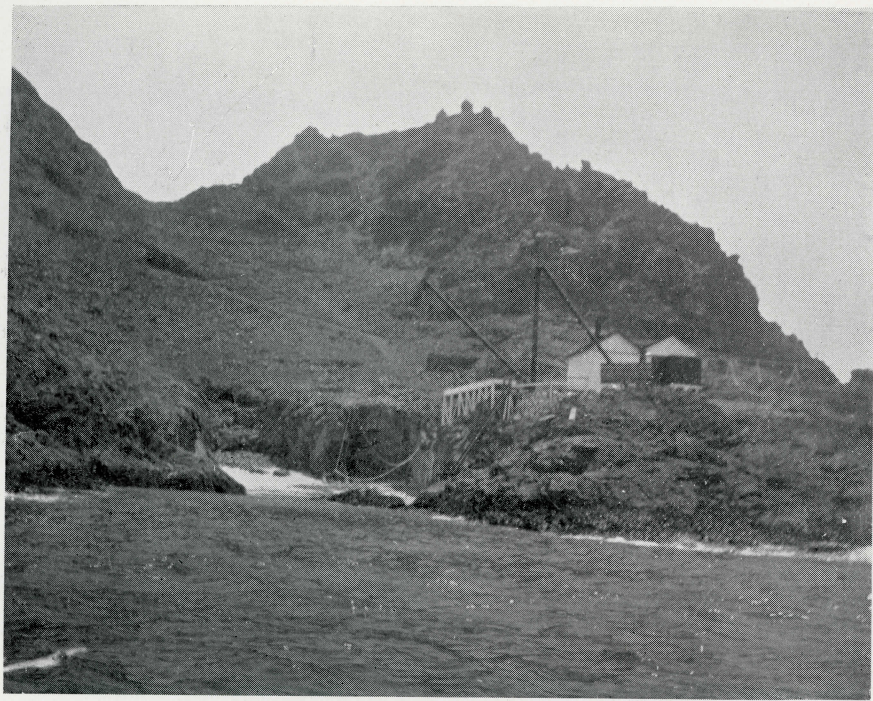
FISHERMAN'S BAY

(PHOTO BY C. B.)

came into view, its whitened sides appearing through the fog with their countless files of Murres and Cormorants, which were in commotion owing to the approach of the "egggers." The mingled cries of the sea fowl came from all sides through the fog, those hidden from view on the surrounding peaks and cliffs adding to the din. Truly a "City of the Birds"!

The Farallone Islands have long been known to ornithologists as the summer breeding home of countless numbers of sea fowl. South Farallone and its closely adjacent rocks are the only ones visited by ornithologists, the bleak North and "Middle" Farallones lying away to the north and being uninhabited by man. South Farallone is one mile long and one-half mile wide at its widest point, being composed of numerous peaks and eminences of varying heights. The island is accessible only by chance tug-boats from San Francisco, thirty miles distant, and in summer by an occasional sloop. In rough weather no communication can be had with the mainland often for weeks at a time. The only natural vegetation consists of a long, spongy weed known as Farallone weed, which is largely used by the birds in nest building, and a few varieties of hardy wild flowers and mosses.

The lighthouse station, which is one of the principal ones on the Pacific Coast, is the most interesting artificial feature of the island. It is situated at the summit of the highest peak at East End and is three hundred and forty feet above the sea. The light, which is reflected through an octagonal revolving lense, is one of the first order. The watch during the night is divided between the keeper and



THE LANDING IN FISHERMAN'S BAY

(PHOTO BY C. B.)



NEST AND EGGS OF THE ROCK WREN



BABY GULL IN NEST

PHOTOS BY C. B.)



HOMES OF THE LIGHT KEEPERS

(PHOTO BY C. B.)

his three assistants. The fog sirens, situated on the low portion of the island facing the ocean, are connected with the lighthouse by signal wires and are operated continuously during foggy weather.

South Farallone Island and its adjacent rocks present an indescribably picturesque appearance, with the rocky and irregular shore line, over which the surf beats incessantly. Forming the northern end of the island are three large rocks known as Finger, Arch and Sugar Loaf, the intervening water between the rocks and landing forming Fisherman's Bay. This is shown in the illustration, which was taken from the lighthouse at the summit of the island. Wherever one may go on the island, the white sentinel crowning the lofty Lighthouse Hill is ever in view. Beyond the group of rocks shown is a small islet known as Seal Rock, and which was the home of hundreds of sea lions up to within two years ago, when they sought new quarters. This islet is separated from the main rocks by a narrow channel, across which the seals could be watched at leisure. Fierce battles between the bulls are of frequent occurrence, and to venture on their rock is no trifling matter. Several young seals were found far up on the Lighthouse Hill, they having worked their way up from the ocean and perished before they could return. Saddle Rock, so named from its peculiar shape, has been appropriated by the seals, where they are less disturbed than formerly. Their hoarse barkings could easily be heard from the keepers' houses—Saddle Rock being situated a few hundred yards south of the main island.



UNDER THE LIGHT—Showing Sacks of Guano

(PHOTO BY C. B.)



THE EGGERS

(PHOTO BY A. L. BOLTON)



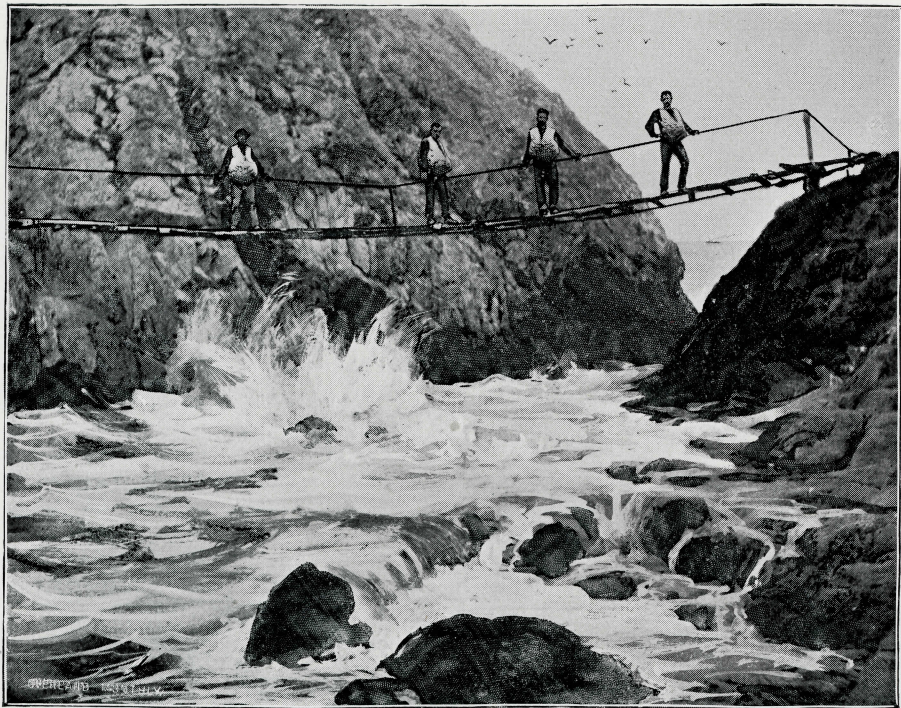
CROSSING ON THE TROLLEY

(COURTESY "OVERLAND MONTHLY")

A home-like feature of the Farallones is the "island mule," the same patient picture of innocence as his more fortunate cousin of the mainland. His occasional bray seems singularly in harmony with the varied harshness of his island home. He is used to haul coal from the landing to the fog sirens, and with the use of pack harness transports cases of coal oil up the steep and tortuous trail to the lighthouse. It is related of his predecessor "Jerry," that he was extremely fond of pastry and would also eat eggs from Gulls' nests which he found in his rambles over the island.

There have been several wrecks on the island, the last occurring several years since, and Franconia Bay at West End derives its name from the wreck of the ship "Franconia" at that place years ago. Wreckage has drifted ashore at various coves along the shore, bearing mute evidence of untold disasters at sea, and the island has many weird legends concerning its early history. At the south side is a cave running into the base of the lighthouse hill for a considerable length, and ending in a large room of irregular proportions. Many years ago the skeleton of a woman was found in this cave and given burial on the hillside near by, where the rude grave is now marked by a stone pile. At the end of the island known familiarly as West End is an immense natural arch of rock, perhaps one hundred and fifty feet high, and which is here shown. The sea rushes through it with unbroken fury, a grand sight in rough weather.

A characteristic view of the island is secured from the lighthouse looking west to the end of the island, almost a mile away, with its broken shore line and

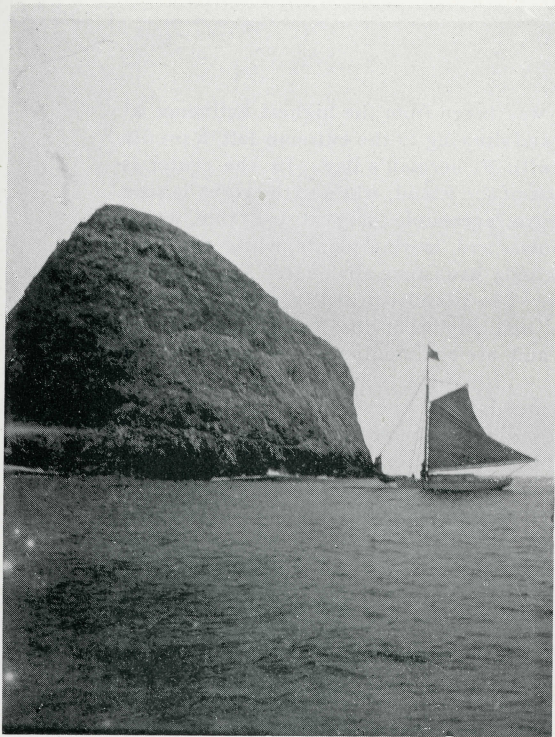


THE "BRIDGE OVER JORDAN"—Joining East and West End
(COURTESY "OVERLAND MONTHLY")



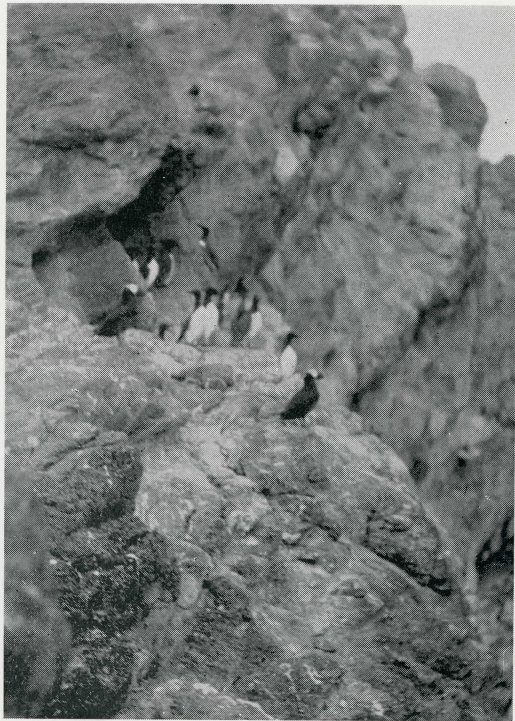
BREAKER'S BAY

(PHOTO BY C. B.)



NEAR TO SUGAR LOAF

(PHOTO BY C. B.)



MURRES AND TUFTED PUFFINS

(PHOTO BY A. L. BOLTON)

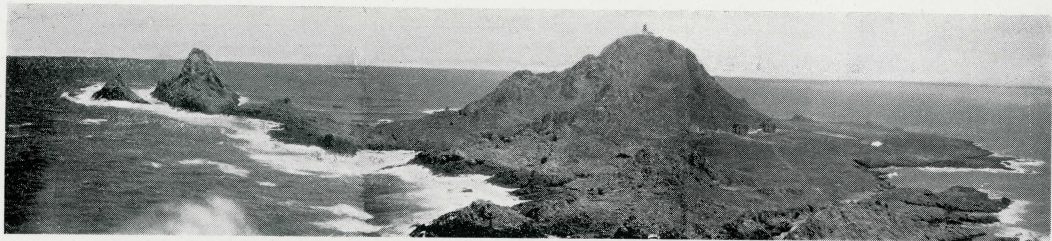
heavy surf. The panoramic view shown was taken from the highest eminence at West End looking toward the mainland, and showing to the extreme left a profile of Finger, Arch and Sugar Loaf Rocks with Fisherman's Bay. In the center is Lighthouse Hill and the intervening portion of the island, while to the right is seen the level portion. At East End is a cave, accessible only at low tide, which contains a most beautiful growth of sea mosses and marine plants, while the floor of the cave is covered with small and strikingly handsome abalones. All along the shore at low tide star fishes are common. The island is thickly populated with rabbits, some being silky ones of a "blue" color, relics of the Russian occupation, which subsist upon the Farallone weed, and are commonly seen scurrying about among the rocks.

The Farallones have perhaps become largely known from the wholesale collecting of Murres eggs for market purposes, and enough has been written of the industry to forbid repetition. To follow the egg-pickers through a day's trip is most interesting. The Murres nest chiefly in colonies, the largest rookery covering a hillside and surrounding cliffs at West End, and being known as the Great Rookery. This is shown in the illustration, the Murres appearing in rows all over the hill, with a small rookery of Farallone Cormorants in the foreground. The Murres nest in suitable places all over the island and outlying rocks, and by far outnumber any other species on the island. The eggers starting together, are soon separated to cover their various routes over the cliffs. As an egger climbs his



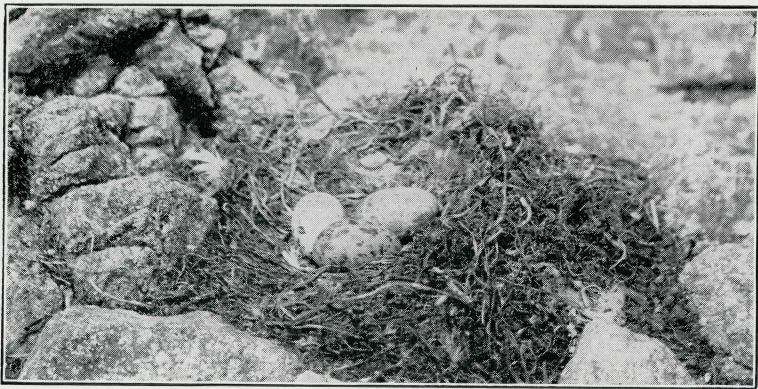
SADDLE ROCK

(PHOTO BY C. B.)



PANORAMIC VIEW SOUTH FARALLONE

(PHOTO BY C. B.)



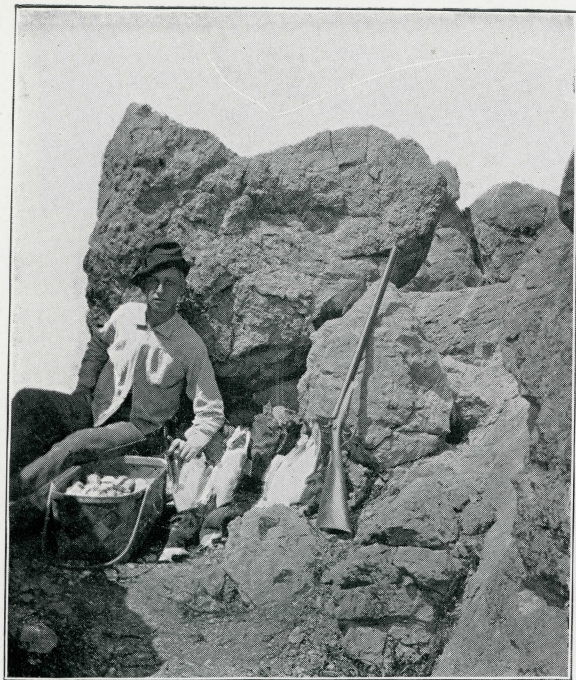
A WESTERN GULL'S NEST

(COURTESY "MUSEUM" ALBION, N. Y.)

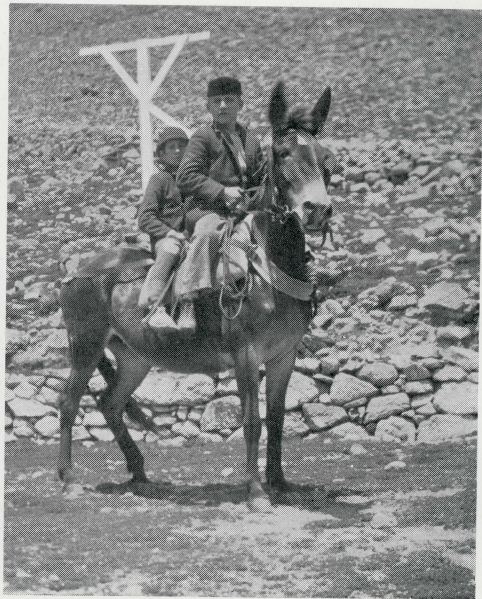


A RUGGED COAST SHOWING PIGEON GUILLEMOTS IN FOREGROUND

(PHOTO BY A. L. BOLTON)



W. H. Osgood's Half Hour Collecting
(COURTESY "THE MUSEUM"—PHOTO BY C. B.)



The Island Mule
(PHOTO BY C. B.)

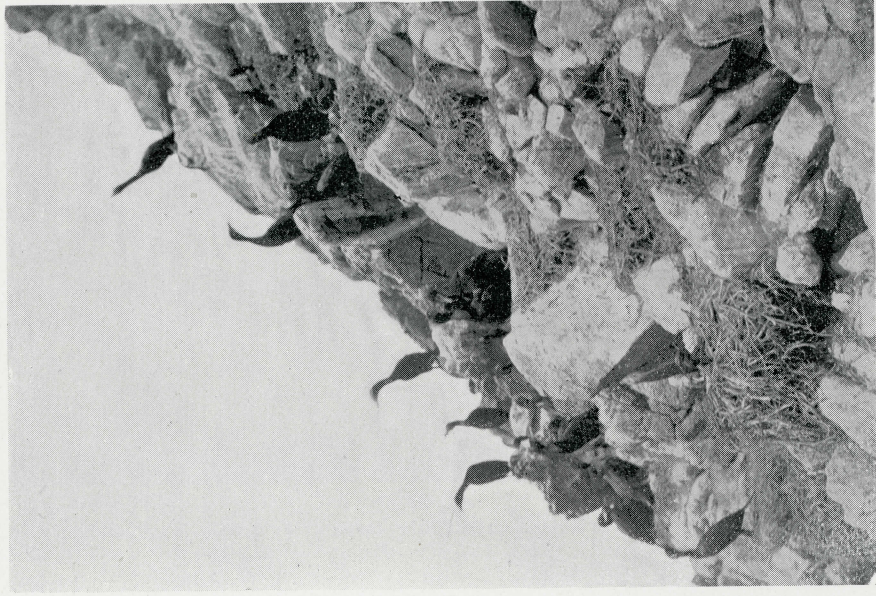


A HARD CLIMB

(PHOTO FURNISHED BY P. W. NAHL)

familiar trail toward the birds, a commotion becomes apparent among the Murres. They jostle their neighbors about the uneven rocks and now and then with open bills utter a vain protest and crowd as far as possible from the intruder without deserting their eggs. But they do not stay his progress and soon a pair, then a group, and finally, as the fright spreads the whole vast rookery take wing toward the ocean. Instantly the Western Gulls congregate with their hollow "kock-kock-ka" and shrill cries adding to the din, to secure their share of the booty, and the egger must then work rapidly to gather the eggs. In the distance perhaps, we see, suspended over a cliff by a slender rope, an egger gathering the eggs from along the narrow shelves of rock, seemingly indifferent to the danger of the work. A novel contrivance is used by the eggers in crossing the channel from Arch to Sugar Loaf Rock, consisting of a wire rope and a chair attached by pulley, and occasionally a visitor ventures to "trip the trolley" across the seething waters.

The bird life of the island is ever its most interesting feature. One of the most typical and interesting nesting grounds is the lofty Lighthouse Hill where are found Auklets, Cormorants, Gulls and Puffins. The bird life at West End is more abundant than at any other portion of the Farallones. Here is the Great Murre Rookery, together with numerous smaller colonies. The vari-colored, pear-shaped eggs are well known. Continuing toward the end of the island the rocks become less precipitous, and here is discovered the homes of the Tufted Puffin, as shown in the illustration, a veritable rookery, with the grotesque birds standing guard all



NESTING COLONY OF FARALLONE CORMORANTS

(PHOTO BY C. B.)

about the rocks. The single egg is laid anywhere among the rocks, sometimes at the end of a burrow two or three feet deep and again in a mere hollow behind or beneath the boulders. A little dry weed is usually scraped together on which to deposit the single egg, which is white with deep shell markings of lilac spread sparingly about the larger end. The birds are close sitters as incubation advances, their white faces readily giving notice of their presence. In the photograph of the Puffins, loaned by Professor Loomis, the one to the left is extremely natural, the Puffins walking awkwardly about the rocks with a comical waddling stride, but on the wing they are adepts. One I watched pitch off the rocks near the lighthouse, took a bee-line down to the ocean with incredible speed. The Tufted Puffins are the most striking birds found on the islands.

The Western Gulls breed commonly on the extensive flat at West End; the nests and eggs blending with the gray rocks. The eggs offer a wide range of variation. On the flat were two boulders leaning toward each other and forming a small arch, and in this shaded spot in two successive seasons a Gull had built its nest, evidently appreciating the protection from the sun.



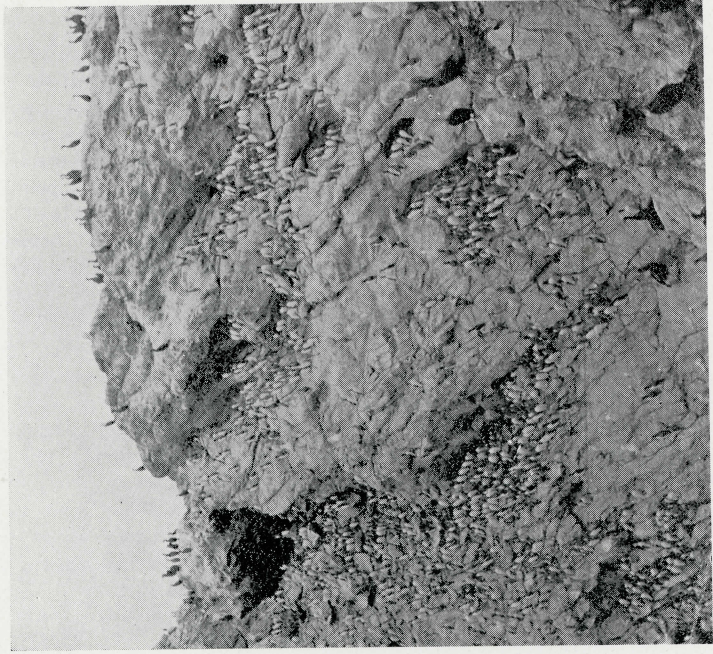
On the various jutting points of West End the Cormorants nest in rookeries, the Farallone variety being most common. The rookeries visited contained from



LIONS OF THE SEA

fifty to two hundred nests, placed close together; averaging one foot in diameter and being composed of Farallone weed and marine algae. The Cormorants are awkward in appearance both on land and in flight, their iridescent green plumage being their only striking feature. Most of the large rookeries had been almost daily raided by the Gulls and complete sets were hard to secure. Both Brandt's and the Farallone nest alike, the eggs being indistinguishable. They are of a light blue, covered with a chalky deposit, and average 2.37×1.53 inches. Three or four eggs seemed to compose full sets but I took one of five eggs from a nest which was hidden and had not been disturbed. Sardines and small fish are always lying about the nests. A small colony of Farallone Cormorants was found on a peak at West End, a few of the birds and their nests being shown in the half-tone. A number of the young crowded each other over the cliff and were found dead at the bottom.

Baird's Cormorant is the least common and more solitary in its habits, rarely more than a few pairs nesting together. They show a decided preference for the sea, frequently nesting in niches in the cliffs near the surf. The smaller size of Baird's and the white flank patches easily distinguish it from the others. The nests are compactly built, usually of dry weed; some measure ten inches high and average nine inches across, and are deeper than those of other species. Three eggs are sometimes a complete set, but more often four or five, and I found one nest containing six. The eggs of this Cormorant average perceptibly smaller than those of the other varieties.



THE GREAT NURRE ROOKERY

(PHOTO BY C. B.)

Along the rocks where the surf rolls in may always be seen groups of Pigeon Guillemots, or "Sea Pigeons," their white wing patches and carmine feet setting off well their black plumage. They rest for long intervals, their occasional low, shrill whistle mingling with the wash of the breakers. Here, perchance, a few nests may be found beneath the boulders, but most of the birds breed further up toward the peaks, among the rocks. Invariably the Guillemots collect a number of pebbles or small chips of rock together on which to lay their eggs. An average set is of a light greenish or pearl ground color, handsomely marked with blotches of brown and lilac in a wreath about the larger end, and two eggs are laid. They are of a timid nature and do not associate with the other birds to any extent.

Cassin's Auklet, nocturnal in its habits, nests commonly on all parts of the island. They use the rabbit burrows in the ground and cavities among the rocks on the hills, laying one unmarked greenish-white egg, large in size for the bird. The Auklets could be heard in concert from the hills at night, their sharp, squeaky cries coming from all sides. On the night of June 17, 1895, with several of the island children and two lanterns, I explored a low hillside near the landing. The birds were calling but could not at first be seen. Soon the lights attracted them and they began to come forth from among the rocks and try to take wing. As long as they were in the circle of light they were dazed and a number of them were easily caught for specimens. Once out of range of the light they were off to sea, and the birds dashed by us all the way on our return to the house.



TUFTED PUFFINS

(PHOTO BY A. L. BOLTON)

The Ashy Petrel has increased in numbers since its nest was discovered on the island in 1885. It nests rather later than the other birds, commencing about June 1, but nidification is not at its height until the middle or latter part of the month. It prefers the stone walls on the flat of the island, beneath which it lays its egg on the sand. They are easily located by the strong musky odor of the bird, which is usually found covering its egg. A majority of the birds I took with eggs were males. In a few instances the Petrel's egg was found on small accumulations of pebbles or chips of rock. The egg is white, usually faintly spotted with reddish-brown in a wreath about the larger end. Seven specimens taken with parents average 1.16x.88 inches.

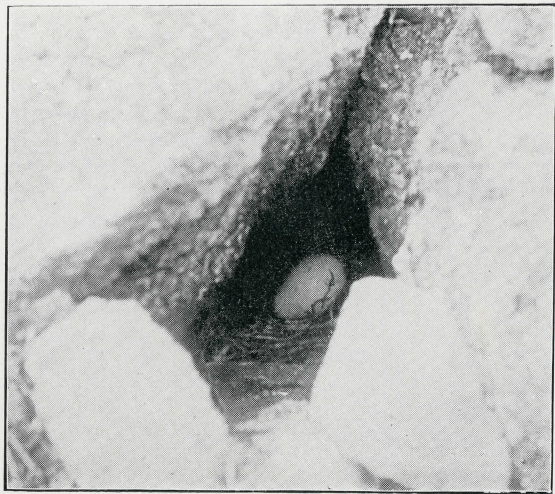
Last July Professor L. M. Loomis found a Petrel similar to Leache's, nesting. From data at hand I am inclined to believe that this form first appeared sparingly on South Farallone in 1895, and it would seem that it has permanently located on the island.

The cheery little Rock Wren completes the list of breeding birds on South Farallone, its presence adding much to the life of the island. In contrast to its bleak and barren home, comes the sparkling, liquid song of the Wren from the rocks, where it nests commonly. Some of the nests are wonderful affairs, built beneath a ledge of rock on the ground or in some crevice of the stone walls. Attention is usually drawn to the breeding site by the curiously paved entrance, of small bleached bones, pebbles and chips of rock. The nest is usually composed of shreds



THE GREAT ARCH

(COURTESY "THE MUSEUM")



TUFTED PUFFINS EGG IN BURROW

(COURTESY "THE MUSEUM")

of weed, held together with horsehair, and lined with goat's or horse-hair. It is quite flat and averages six inches in diameter. From four to eight eggs are laid, of a rather glossy white, sparingly spotted with reddish-brown about the larger end.

How changed the island at night! The sun sinks into the ocean, its mellow rays glinting the wave-crests, and a shadow o'erspreads the island. The wind once more is at play with the waves, and the birds seek their roosting places on the cliffs, their cries becoming less clamorous as night settles down.

All is dark, when suddenly the cries of the Auklets come forth from the hills near by, and the birds of the night claim the island as their own. Down on the shore the ocean washes listlessly upon the rocks, and now and then a Gull, phantom-like, floats by in silence, awed as it were by the solemnity of the scene.

Far up on the hill flashes the light, its alternate rays and dark intervals stretching far out to sea. There is a momentary lull among the bird populace, and again the weird cries break forth from the rocks—an indescribable concert. From the lofty sentinel on the cliffs, silhouetted against the starlit dome, the light flashes on. It is night on the Farallones!

◆ ————— ◆
FINIS



A FOGGY SUNSET—From the Tug

(COURTESY "OVERLAND MONTHLY")



ARCH ROCK

(PHOTO BY C. B.)